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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001293

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SUBJECT: TURKEY APPROACHES MEDITERRANEAN UNION WITH CAUTION  
AND CYNICISM

REF: PARIS 1358

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

**¶1.** (C) Summary: Despite PM Erdogan's last minute decision to attend the Mediterranean Union Summit July 13-14, the GOT remains highly skeptical of the organization's viability, as well as French intentions. Turkey's MFA successfully negotiated a series of concessions in the final communiqu to ensure the Mediterranean Union would not become an alternative to full EU membership for Turkey, as first proposed by President Sarkozy during his election campaign, and guaranteeing Turkish Cypriot project access. Turkey will likely hedge committing further to the Union concept until after modalities are finalized at a Ministerial in November. Erdogan and Sarkozy primarily discussed Turkey's EU accession bid during their side meeting. Sarkozy reportedly offered assurances that his opposition to Turkish membership would not influence France's actions as the EU Presidency Chairman.

Meanwhile, growing French interest in the Israel/Syria talks is not necessarily welcomed in Ankara, which may further cool an already tepid bilateral relationship. End Summary.

**¶2.** (C) Although the Union for the Mediterranean has evolved significantly since French President Sarkozy first floated the idea as an alternative to Turkish EU membership, the GOT maintains strong reservations. MFA EU Political Relations Department Head Cengiz Furat explained Turkey supports the Mediterranean Union as a forum for expanding the Barcelona Process and increasing regional dialogue. Nevertheless, the GOT worries that France will use Turkey's Mediterranean Union membership to block its EU bid and that the organization could exasperate existing Eastern Mediterranean tensions. The GOT is especially leery of project selection; Greece and Cyprus have already submitted a regional sea highway project that would exclude Turkey. The MFA will closely monitor how such modalities are addressed at the November Ministerial before deciding the full extent of Turkish participation.

NEGOTIATING A PRENUPTIAL AGREEMENT

**¶3.** (C) French Embassy Second Secretary Francois-Xavier Reymond told us Turkey played extremely coy in the months leading up to the Paris Summit. When the French Government first broached the issue in February, the GOT maintained it "must evaluate" the proposal before committing. The MFA insisted on communiqu language stating: 1) Turkey is an EU aspirant country; 2) membership in the Mediterranean Union and the EU are not mutually exclusive; and 3) the maritime and land highways projects will apply to the entire Mediterranean basin. In addition, the GOT wanted assurances that Turkish Cypriots would be allowed to participate in Union projects. Although the MFA approved the joint

declaration at a July 3-4 working level meeting, PM Erdogan only agreed to attend the Paris Summit after Sarkozy extended three written invitations and made a last-minute plea on July 8 via telephone.

SYMBOLIC MEETING ON THE MARGINS

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¶4. (C) Reymond described Erdogan and Sarkozy's bilateral meeting as "symbolic," highlighting the fact that the two leaders had never previously met with full protocols in either capital. Sarkozy reportedly explained that the original concept for the Mediterranean Union reflected campaign rhetoric and was never operationalized, underscoring that membership in this Mediterranean Union does not preclude EU accession. During France's Presidency, Sarkozy told Erdogan the EU would open as many chapters as possible (at least two) as determined by Turkey's technical readiness. Sarkozy, nevertheless, cautioned that France had not changed its position on Turkey's EU membership.

¶5. (C) Sarkozy lauded Turkey's mediation efforts between Israel and Syria during a brief discussion on the Middle East peace process. On other issues, Erdogan and Sarkozy simply agreed to disagree. Furat said the tone was congenial, adding that both leaders skirted the more contentious issues.

France's decision to circumvent protocol and seat Erdogan at Sarkozy's table for dinner was well received, Furat commented.

MORE OF THE SARKO SHOW?

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¶6. (C) Comment: Despite Erdogan's attendance at the Paris

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Summit, the GOT is approaching the Mediterranean Union with caution and cynicism. Many Turks question whether it will become anything "more than the Sarko Show." Furthermore, the GOT does not want to create another venue for France and Cyprus to challenge Turkey's EU aspirations. France's use of the Paris Summit to reestablish itself as a Middle East player has also raised some eyebrows here. Although Turkey has publicly stated it supports all efforts to advance the Middle East peace process, France's newfound interest in the Israel/Syria talks, an issue on which Turkey has hung its foreign policy credentials, could lead to additional tension in the bilateral relationship. End Comment.

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